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STATE FOR INL/LP AND WHA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [SNAR](#) [PTER](#) [NU](#)
SUBJECT: OVER 540 KILOS OF COCAINE SEIZED AT PENAS BLANCAS

REF: MANAGUA 02546

¶1. (SBU) Nicaraguan National Police (NNP) seized over 540 kilograms of cocaine on February 22 at the Penas Blancas vehicle inspection station. According to post law enforcement sources, the NNP pulled the suspicious-looking vehicle aside as it crossed the border from Costa Rica. There were irregularities in the documents the driver presented and the vehicle was loaded with scrap metal and some 800 oil filters. (Comment: Vehicles loaded with scrap metal often cross the border. However, according to the NNP, oil filters are used to mask the scent of drugs and confuse the drug sniffing dogs. End Comment.)

¶2. (SBU) After unloading the flatbed, the NNP found a 20-foot long steel girder that showed marks of recent welding camouflaged with grease. There 540 kilograms of cocaine were hidden in the girder and covered with dirt and cooking spices to mask the scent of the drugs)- which was so effective that the K-9s did not alert on the drugs until the girder had been dismantled. The vehicle was apparently headed to Guatemala. The driver of the vehicle is currently in police custody.

¶3. (U) The Penas Blancas vehicle inspection station, largely built with INL funds, provides a basic facility for the police to identify and inspect suspicious cargo trucks. Over 200 trucks pass daily through the station located on the border with Costa Rica. After reviewing details on the drivers and cargo, the NNP thoroughly inspects around 10 percent of the total number of trucks. The officers use dogs to detect contraband (a Post-funded program) and then perform a detailed inspection of the vehicle and cargo. The police frequently work with other regional law enforcement agencies and with the DEA on joint operations.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: Repairs are urgently needed at the Penas Blancas vehicle inspection station to improve working conditions and officers' effectiveness in detecting contraband. Post is trying to reprioritize projects and locate funds for the repairs. We have already invested significant resources in building the inspection station and do not want to see that investment wasted. End Comment.
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